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Deputy Asst. Port Director envisions high-tech approach to tracking international travelers

Center for Homeland Defense and Security

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As a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Deputy Assistant Port Director, Isabel Galantino is very familiar with the challenges of screening international travelers seeking entry or re-entry into the United States. In her technology course paper, Galantino examined how using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) could facilitate CBP's vision of a "One Face at the Border" entry policy. Her work envisioned applying technology used at the nation's land borders, to read license plate information, to airport travel. Her work envisioned applying technology used to read license plate information at the nation's land borders to track international airport travelers.

1) Galantino's course paper, "RFID to Track Passenger Referrals in Air Ports of Entry," outlines the basic procedure for admitting air travelers from international origins of departure into the United States. Moreover, it points to the weakness in the procedure in relying on human personnel to serve as gatekeepers in defending against absconders.
Officers must rely on paperwork and keen observation to determine if a passenger is cleared to exit. According to Galantino, in some cases, with a multitude of travelers waiting to be serviced, people hand over paperwork that calls for further screening and still manage to abscond. This could be addressed, she argued, by using an RFID system to track high-risk passengers referred to secondary screening for CBP processing. RFID uses tags that can be tracked by radio waves. Technology currently on the market and employed in the health care, theme park, and transportation environments can be adopted by CBP for this purpose, Galantino wrote. Galantino recommended that an industry leader in the field of real-time location solutions be contracted to tailor a solution for CBP.

2) Galantino's idea has yet to progress into practice, she said. A cash-strapped government and the likely high cost of such as system make the idea challenging to implement at this time.

3) To see the diffusion of RFID tracking technologies within an airport environment as envisioned by Galantino, the up-front costs would have to decrease and public sector agencies may need to consider partnering with private sector firms in leveraging the use of RFID technologies that are already in place or planned for. One example might include leveraging the airlines' use of RFID technologies to track baggage.

But Galantino is putting her CHDS technology education to use. She has been named to an agency task force called the Strategic Management and Review Team (SMART). As part of that effort, she said she will be pushing for technological enhancements to the agency's screening program.